

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 08713

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, FR
SUBJECT: FRENCH LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

1. IF THE NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS WE HAVE SEEN SO FAR ON THE FRENCH ELECTIONS ARE ANY INDICATION OF THE PRESS REPORTING BEING READ IN WASHINGTON, I THINK IT WOULD BE WISE TO EMPHASIZE SEVERAL INCONCLUSIVE ASPECTS OF THESE ELECTIONS. EVERYBODY HERE IS TRYING DESPERATELY TO DECIPHER THE FIRST-ROUND RESULTS AND THEIR EFFECT ON INTER-PARTY NEGOTIATIONS, PARTICULARLY AMONG THE LEFT PARTIES. THE RESULTS OF THESE NEGOTIATIONS WILL NOT BE KNOWN BEFORE TONIGHT AT THE EARLIEST. IN THESE UNCERTAIN AND FAST-MOVING CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT THAT THE USG STEER STEADFASTLY CLEAR OF ANY REACTION OR COMMENT.

2. SOME OF THE PECULIARITIES OF THE FRENCH SCENE WHICH NEED TO BE BORNE IN MIND IN INTERPRETING THE ELECTION RESULTS AND THE EVENTS OF THIS WEEK BEFORE THE SECOND AND FINAL ROUND ON MARCH 19 INCLUDE:

-- THE FIRST ROUND OF THE FRENCH ELECTIONS IS A GRAB-BAG, INCLUDING EVERY IMAGINABLE PARTY AND
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POLITICIAN. THIS MAKES INTERPRETATION AND CATEGORIZATION DIFFICULT. EACH PARTY CAN JUGGLE THE FIGURES TO INCLUDE VARIOUS MINOR FORMATIONS IN THE VOTE OF THE LEFT OR THE RIGHT TO ITS OWN ADVANTAGE AND TO DEPRESS THE SCORE OF ITS OPPONENT.
-- THIS MEANS THAT EACH PARTY CAN CLAIM TO BE AT

LEAST RELATIVELY SATISFIED, THE MAJORITY PARTIES FOR DOING BETTER THAN EXPECTED, THE SOCIALISTS FOR DOING 3 PERCENT BETTER THAN IN THE LAST LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN 1973, AND THE COMMUNISTS FOR REDUCING THE GAP BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THE SOCIALISTS.

-- FRENCH VOTERS VOTE DIFFERENTLY ON THE FIRST AND SECOND ROUNDS. THEIR CHOICE WILL BE IN MOST CASES BETWEEN TWO CANDIDATES (ONE FROM EACH THE MAJORITY AND OPPOSITION) RATHER THAN AN AVERAGE OF NINE ON THE FIRST ROUND. WITH SO MANY CLOSE RACES INVOLVED, THE VOTE OF THOSE WHO CHOSE MARGINAL PARTIES YESTERDAY (MORE THAN 10 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE) MAY BE CRUCIAL ON THE SECOND ROUND NEXT SUNDAY.

-- AS SOON AS THE FINAL STATISTICS ARE IN, SIMULATIONS WILL BE RUN ON HOW TO TRANSLATE THEM INTO PARLIAMENTARY SEATS. WHILE THE FRENCH ELECTORAL LAW PROHIBITS THEIR PUBLICATION AT THIS POINT IN THE CAMPAIGN, WORD OF THESE PROJECTIONS WILL CERTAINLY LEAK AND FEED RUMORS ABOUT THE PRESUMED WINNERS AND LOSERS. THE RUMORS WHICH SPREAD IN THE LAST WEEK ON THE FIRST ROUND VOTE HAVE DEMONSTRATED JUST HOW UNRELIABLE THESE CALCULATIONS AND PREDICTIONS CAN BE.

-- EITHER SIDE CAN STILL WIN. GIVEN THE PRESENT

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NON-PROPORTIONAL SYSTEM OF VOTING IN FRANCE, THE DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS WITHIN EACH OF THE TWO BLOCS WILL PROBABLY NOT EXACTLY FOLLOW THE FIRST-ROUND VOTE PERCENTAGES. THUS, THOUGH SLIGHTLY BEHIND AFTER THE FIRST ROUND, THE MAJORITY IS PROBABLY IN A BETTER POSITION THAN THE LEFT AS OF THIS WRITING. BUT, I WOULD EMPHASIZE, ANYTHING COULD STILL HAPPEN.

HARTMAN

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